

Connecting Up America's National Parks With Improved Roads

A. L. Westgard, Highways Enthusiast, "Daniel Boone of the Gasoline Age"

By H. O. BISHOP

WHAT do you know about the national parks of the United States? Have you any idea how many there are and where they are located? It is an indisputable fact that the United States furnishes to the people playgrounds which are without rivals in all the world. Just as the cities are seeing the wisdom and necessity of open spaces for the children and grown-ups, so with a large vision the nation has been saving from its domain the rarest places of grandeur and beauty for the enjoyment of the world.

This nation is richer in natural scenery of the first order than any other nation on earth. But the trouble is, we hardly realize it as yet. We possess an empire of grandeur and beauty about which comparatively few citizens have ever heard. We own the most inspiring playgrounds and the best equipped nature schools in the world, and we are serenely ignorant of the fact.

It has only been within the past year that any considerable number of people visited the great national parks. That such mountains and glaciers, lakes and canyons, forests and waterfalls were to be found in this country was a revelation to many who had heard but not believed.

Individual features of several of our national parks are known the world over; but very few to whom the Yosemite Valley is a household word know that its seven wonderful miles are a part of a scenic wonderland of eleven hundred square miles called the Yosemite National Park. So with the Yellowstone; all have heard of its geysers, but few indeed of its 3,300 square miles of wilderness beauty. Some of our finest national parks you probably never have even heard of. The Sequoia, soon to be renamed the Roosevelt National Park, one of the noblest scenic areas on earth, is the home of more than a million sequoias, the celebrated big trees of California. The Crater Lake National Park incloses the deepest and bluest lake in the world surrounded by walls of pearly fretted lavas of indescribable beauty. Mount Ranier has 28 glaciers or rivers of ice, banked by veritable gardens of wild flowers. The Rocky Mountain National Park is amazingly diversified, with valleys and dozens of peaks towering more than 12,000 feet into the skies. The Mesa Verde National Park is dotted with well-preserved ruins of a civilization which passed out of existence so many centuries ago that not even tradition recalls its people. And then there is the Grand Canyon National Park which Theodore Roosevelt characterized as "absolutely unparalleled throughout the wide world." Charles Dudley Warner said it was "the most sublime of all earthly spectacles," and John Muir expressed himself in these words: "A wilderness so Godful, Cosmic and Primeval." The Glacier National Park with its 60 glaciers feeding hundreds of lakes, and its cliffs several thousand feet high presents a scenery truly Alpine. The Zion National Park is a perfect riot of colors reflected on cliffs and in canyons.

It may be said that one of the striking features of the 10 main national parks is that each one of them is quite different from all the others, each having a marked individuality of its own.

Every person in these United States ought to know much about these parks and visit them when possible, for considered together, they contain more features of conspicuous grandeur than are readily accessible in all the rest of the world together.

Nearly 40,000 motorists toured Yellowstone Park in 1919, of whom 60 per cent brought with them their own camp equipment and enjoyed for days the special camp grounds where an abundance of wood, water and toilet facilities were furnished free of charge. Some 60,000 motorists visited the Rocky Mountain National Park last year, while 18,000 stopped at the Yosemite National Park. There was an unprecedented increase of visitors at the other parks during the same period. All the parks are comfortably equipped with camping facilities, including water, wood and toilets. This increase in park visitors is most gratifying as tending to show that the people are beginning properly to appreciate their vacation grounds and to enjoy the glorious outdoor life which is bound to reflect most beneficially on the health of the nation.

Heretofore it has been extremely difficult to reach some of these parks because of their remoteness from improved highways and from trunk line railroads.

There is now, however, a well defined movement being organized to connect the various parks with a road to be known as the National Park-to-Park highway. This highway will be co-operative, joining with established highways from the East and West. A most interesting man has tackled the colossal task of blazing the trail for this vast system of park connecting roads. He is A. L. Westgard, field representative of the American Automobile Association, who is known in the automobile and good roads world as the king of pathfinders.

Christopher Columbus discovered the outer edge of America, but it remained for this man Westgard to discover and revive the old trails of the inhabitants of past centuries, and to preach facts and spread enthusiasm, until the people living adjacent thereto converted these old trails into modern highways well-nigh as smooth as a ballroom floor.

In searching out roads for the laying out of the stupendous system of transcontinental and Canada-to-the-Gulf highways, which now make it possible for the motorist to take jaunts about the continent with ease and speed, Mr. Westgard has found it necessary to make 20 trips from ocean to ocean and 30 trips from the Canadian border to the southern boundary of the United States. On all these trips he was accompanied by his genial wife, who has the distinction of having traveled more miles in an automobile than any woman in the world. The Westgards are as familiar with the country roads of every state in the Union as "Uncle Joe" Cannon and Champ Clark are with the streets of Washington. Much of this pioneer roadway exploring was done over old trails which had never before been penetrated by man other than on horse or mule or on foot. Westgard commenced this useful work back in 1903 and has been unceasingly sticking to the job from that day to this. He has worn out 18 cars in his travels, and will start out with his nineteenth in a few weeks when he begins locating the national park connecting roadways.

When American auto tourists traverse the more than 40 great highways along the lines of latitude and longitude they should offer a fervid amen to Westgard, because all these roads follow the trail of the Westgard pathfinding car.

In most of the small towns of the country the coming of Westgard on one of his highway locating tours was looked upon as an event well worth celebrating. This usually took the form of a banquet staged by the local chamber of commerce. These occasions were usually attended by more or less speechmaking—usually more. His introductions on such occasions are always original and amusing. He has been variously referred to as, "The greatest pathfinder since Daniel Boone and General Fremont;" "Daniel Boone of the Gasoline Age;" "John the Baptist of the Good Roads Gospel;" and "The Great Pathfinder of the Good Roads Era." But it remained for the mayor of a small town in Georgia to give him a real title. In speaking of this incident Mr. Westgard said: "I was escorted

to the band stand in the middle of the public square, around which a majority of the citizens of the town and surrounding country were assembled. After the mayor had made some rather lengthy and not altogether apropos remarks to the people he told them that they should feel especially honored that auspicious

day in having among them a man such as myself. Beckoning me to come forward to the railing, he exclaimed in a voice of thunder that could be heard all over the town: 'Allow me to present to you, my fellow citizens, the most notorious tourist of the age.' Just that. Of course the laugh was on me."

Here is Mr. Westgard's answer to my query as to whether he had ever been bothered with lawless individuals while traveling across the wild and sparsely inhabited sections of the country. "In spite of our long rambles on rubber tires throughout the United States, very frequently into remote regions reputed to be the hide-outs of renegades, into desolate areas visited only by nomadic Indian tribes or into lands where only Negroes inhabit vast swampy tracts, or sections where only Mexicans dwell, we have never been molested nor have we even seen the sign of a suspicious desire to get unduly acquainted with our outfit except on one solitary occasion and that, as may easily

be realized by those who have roamed the great out-of-doors, occurred in a city, the safe breeding place for crimes and criminals."

Mrs. Westgard is a woman with a keen sense of humor. Journeying across the country is invariably looked upon by her as an interesting lark. In discussing some of their strange and funny experiences she told this amusing story: "While we were passing through Alabama on the now famous Dixie Highway, we stopped for the night at the only hotel in the town. I inquired of the clerk-bellhop-chambermaid if there was a chance to have some laundry done the next day, which we had planned to spend at this place. I was politely as-

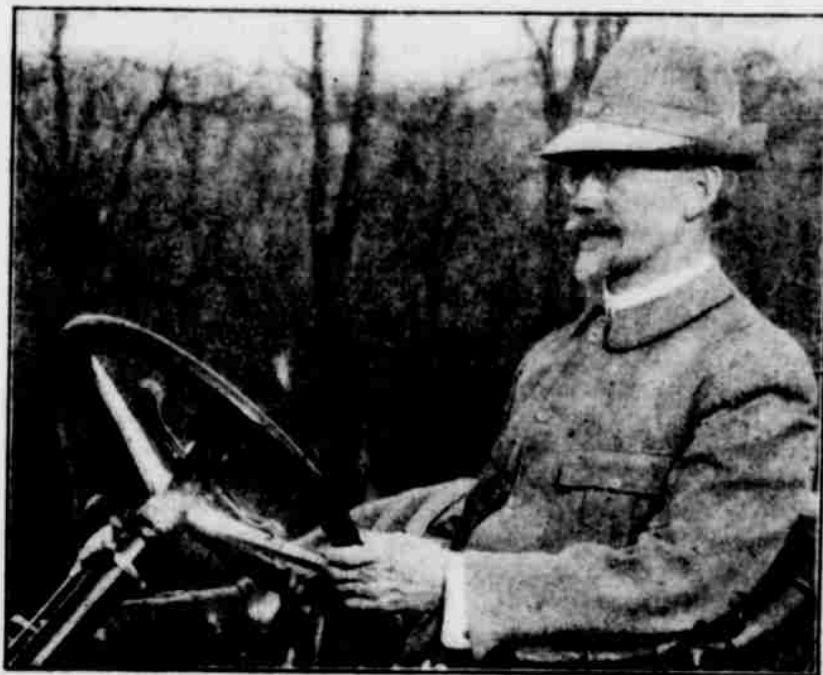
sured that such an arrangement would be fixed up for me. Early the next morning the clerk sent word to me that Queen Victoria was downstairs, should he send her up. Having for the moment forgotten about the laundry, and assuming that my husband was endeavoring to play a joke on me, I put on my society airs and told the clerk that I would be much honored to have her majesty grace our humble quarters with her august presence. In a few moments there was a timid knock on the door. I opened it wide, and there stood a coal-black Negro woman with a wide grin showing gleaming white teeth and the white of her eyes shining like two stars. Clutching her dress, one on each side, were two tiny pickaninnies some four or five years old, curiosity and wonder depicted on their curly-topped little black faces. The woman said she was Queen Victoria, the laundress. The two kids were twins and named Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis, while upon inquiry I learned that the husband's name was George Washington. These were all given names, the family name being McDowell—truly an historic and distinguished family, I should say."

"Next to being asked what tires I use and can recommend," smilingly remarked Mr. Westgard, "the question most often put to me is how many miles I have traveled in my many years of pathfinding. My answer is that I do not know, though I have most likely traveled more different (note the word different) miles on rubber tires than any man in the world. This I believe to be true.

"When any one makes an offhand statement that he has traveled two, three, four or even five hundred thousand miles, he should not be taken too seriously. Just apply the yardstick to these figures and note how they dwindle. I noted in the press recently that a comparatively young man had traveled about 800,000 miles in 15 years and that he hoped to cover a round million, or a distance equal to 40 times around the earth at the equator.

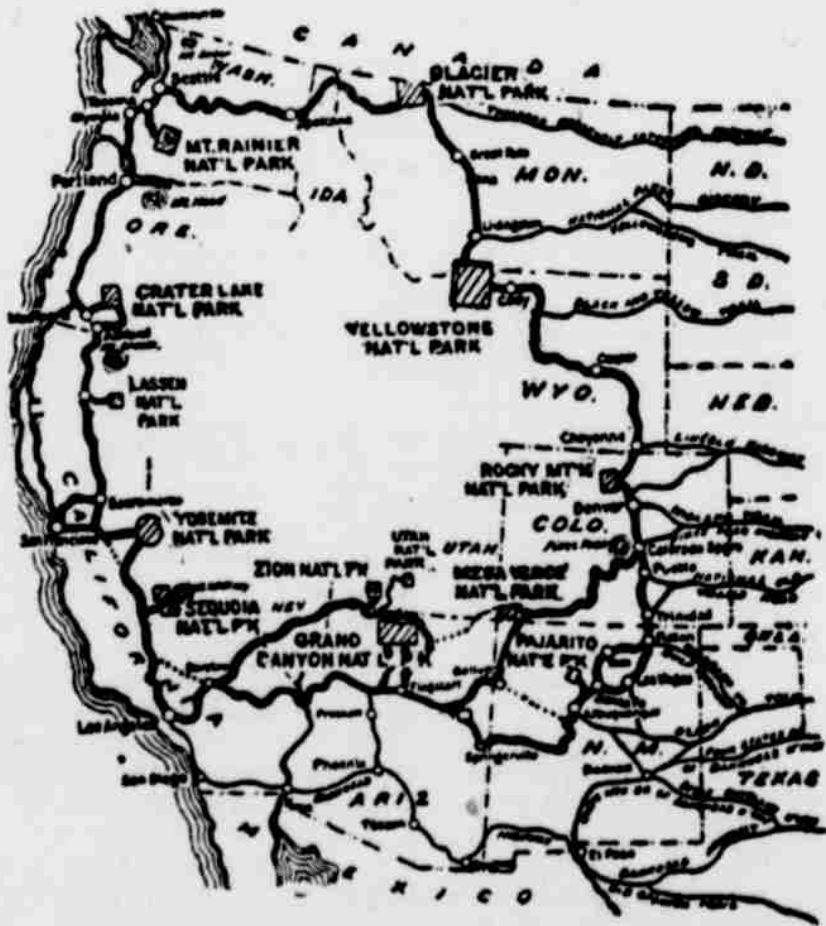
"Let us stop for a moment and analyze these figures. Eight hundred thousand miles in 15 years makes 53,333 miles a year, or over 141 miles a day for every day in the year—Sunday, holiday and week day. If a day should be missed it would be necessary to double up the next day or to cover 282 miles. To do this summer and winter, rain or shine, mud or snow, for 15 consecutive years is, of course, preposterous. That any one has covered one-half that distance in that time is not impossible, but hardly within the range of probability.

"I confine myself to the safe statement that I have made more motor trips across the United States, East and West, North and South, than any other man, and that these trips were mostly over different routes."



A. L. WESTGARD

The good roads enthusiast who has undertaken the task of planning a system of improved roads connecting up America's national parks.



Proposed highway connecting up the national parks. Note how the great road systems of the country flow into it.